

Mary's Boy Child: Boney M brought my dad fame and tragedy

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Daughter of Bobby Farrell tells of sadness two years on from his lonely death



Happy times: Bobby Farrell with Boney M

If your dad was a pop star with a multi-million selling Christmas single then this time of year should be extra cheery.

But for Zanillya Farrell – daughter of Boney M front man Bobby – the memories are bittersweet whenever she hears Mary's Boy Child on the radio.

This will be the second Christmas since she lost her beloved father, who was 61 when he died in a hotel room in Russia on December 30, 2010.

Bobby Farrell was the larger-than-life performer who fronted one of the world's most successful acts with hit after hit at the height of the 70s disco boom.

Joker

He went from poverty to riches – and back again, leaving allegations he was cheated out of a fortune by German record producer Frank Farian.

Zanillya, 29, has talked for the first time about her late father, revealing her belief that Boney M drove him to drugs and booze and wrecked his marriage.

And she called on Farian to account for his part in Bobby's decline.

She told the Sunday People: "Fame brings a price with it. Fame was good and bad for him.

"When I was a child he was so funny and loved jokes. He was always a joker but towards the end of his life he was sick a lot and told me he didn't want to live any more."

Bobby, found dead in his room in St Petersburg, ended his days doing what he loved – - performing.

He was born on Aruba in the Caribbean and was a DJ in Holland in 1975 when he was recruited by Farian, now 71, for Boney M – with Liz Mitchell, Marcia Barrett and Maizie Williams.

The group sold more than 150million records and peaked in 1978 when Rivers of Babylon, Brown Girl in the Ring and Rasputin became huge global hits.

Boney M also had that year's UK Christmas No1, selling more than two million copies of Mary's Boy Child – Oh My Lord. Bobby became a rich man.

But the band allegedly had a share of only nine per cent of the royalties. And when the hits dried up the cash flow dwindled.

Zanillya's mother Yasmina married Bobby in 1981. Their daughter said: "Mum learned how the business worked and asked about contracts. Eventually my father asked Farian what their contract was but he said he became 'very weird' so my father left the band."

When Zanillya was born in 1983 her parents lived in a 13-bedroom mansion in Germany.

But they were on borrowed time financially and the contract with Farian had to be renewed.

Zanillya claimed: "When Dad asked Farian for 100,000 marks he was told to sign some papers.

He signed away everything – image rights, royalties, the lot. My father lost everything. We had to move in with my grandmother in the Netherlands and live on welfare. After that, Dad started getting angry a lot.

“But Mum was very smart and realised if you own the name you can use it.

“Farian had not registered Boney M all over the world. So that’s why Dad could perform in certain countries.”

Bobby had to go on the road to make a living, which created difficulties. Zanillya recalled: “Dad was not really there for family life. Mum said he had multiple relationships on tour. They were both fiery and on occasions it got physical and violent.

“When I was 12 they split and it was traumatic. Mum got away from it all in Italy. My brother Zanin and I went to live with Dad.

“Losing my mother, the love of his life, was difficult. He was a good person and a good father but at some point he lost it. My mother had been there to shield us but I saw him crumble.

“He complained he could not sleep – too much on his mind. He would take sleeping pills and pills for his blood. He said ‘I do not want to live any more.’

“Because of the stress of Boney M he started doing alcohol and drugs. He took coke, though he gave that up later.

“But I think this gave him personality disorders and mood swings.”

Bobby’s funeral reunited the three Boney M girls for the first time in many years and they read out a eulogy at his memorial service in Amsterdam.

Zanillya said: “He would have been so happy at that. I heard rumours the women are getting back together.”

Bobby, who said he was “blessed” because he was in Boney M, did sing live but his voice is not on the records. He left an estate worth £500,000.

His daughter said: “I wonder if Farian has a conscience but I don’t hate him. One day maybe he’ll explain to me how he could let my father feel like this.”

Zanillya, who is building a career as a hip-hop artist in Europe, added: “I have big dreams, just like my father.”

Asked what is her favourite Boney M song she smiled and replied: "Daddy Cool. It has to be. They are also the words on his gravestone."

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